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INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 9491
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 9013
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5578
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0773
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6215
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0012
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4153

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 007804

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BROWNFIELD'S OCTOBER 29 MEETING WITH
CARDINAL PEDRO RUBIANO

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield
Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Ambassador told Cardinal Pedro Rubiano on October 29 that the USG would consider joint efforts with the Church on health, education, and poverty reduction projects. Rubiano said the National Conciliation Commission has useful insights into peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Army of National Liberation (ELN). Rubiano encouraged the Ambassador to meet with the Commission. The Ambassador welcomed such a meeting. Rubiano added that the Catholic Church in Venezuela faces increasing pressure from President Chavez, and said that the Vatican and other Churches in the region should support it during this difficult period. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Brownfield paid a courtesy call on Cardinal Pedro Rubiano, Archbishop of Bogota. Rubiano welcomed the Ambassador to Colombia, and noted that he had several friends in the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference. The Ambassador said that the USG wants to maintain excellent relations with the Catholic Church, and voiced a willingness to work with the Church on social programs, including health, education and poverty reduction projects. U.S. support could come through USAID or U.S. business and non-governmental groups.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador noted that we support any credible initiatives designed to achieve the liberation of all the hostages held by the FARC, including the three American citizens, and asked for the Cardinal's assessment of Senator Cordoba's and President Chavez' efforts to facilitate a humanitarian exchange. Rubiano remarked on the difficulty of negotiations with the FARC and ELN due to their rigid ideological positions and that President Uribe also strongly holds his ground. Rubiano created the National Conciliation Commission, which consists of clergy, former GOC officials, and civil society representative, in 1995 to promote peace initiatives with the FARC, ELN and other illegal armed groups. He said that the Commission members have useful insights into peace talks with the two groups, and urged the Ambassador to meet with them. The Ambassador replied that he would welcome such a session.

¶4. (C) The Cardinal said the Colombian Catholic Church maintains close ties with the Venezuelan Church. His Venezuelan counterparts face growing pressure from President Chavez; the Vatican and Catholic Bishops throughout the

region should support their Venezuelan colleagues during this difficult period. Rubiano said he had lobbied his fellow bishops to elect Venezuelan Archbishop Baltazar Porras as Secretary General of the Latin American Bishops Conference

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(CELAM) to give him a reason to travel regularly out of Venezuela. In the end, however, the bishops elected Porras First Vice-president.

Brownfield